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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000868

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SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY AND PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR SHARE
THINKING ON GSL MILITARY AND HUMANITARIAN TIMETABLES

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

1 (C) Summary: In September 12 meetings with Ambassador, DATT and AID Director, Defense Secretary Rajapaksa and senior Presidential Advisor Basil Rajapaksa shared their thinking on the future course of the GSL's military campaign in the north and the humanitarian implications. Defense Secretary Rajapaksa thought that the Sri Lankan military would be able to capture Pooneryn and Kilinochchi by the end of the year, while capturing Mullaitivu in the east would take longer due to the onset of monsoon rains in October and expected heavier LTTE resistance. In a later meeting with Basil Rajapaksa, who is the President's senior advisor and coordinator on all humanitarian issues, the Ambassador and AID Director Cohn expressed concern about the ability of Government Agents to manage the humanitarian situation in the north without the UN and urged the GSL to consider the establishment of safe areas, humanitarian corridors or other measures to ensure the safety of civilians in the Vanni. Rajapaksa said the GSL is planning to provide a three-month supply of food and non-food relief to the north, after which the GSL expects large numbers of IDPs to be able to move into Government-controlled areas. The Ambassador urged the GSL to reassure IDPs that if they move south, they will not be fired on by Sri Lankan military, will not be subject to human rights abuses, and that they and their families will be allowed to remain together and receive care and prompt resettlement with the help of UN agencies. Rajapaksa confirmed another leaflet drop is planned. Rajapaksa also reassured Ambassador that the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) leader Devananda would not be appointed interim head of a northern provincial council. End summary.

Defense Secretary Careful Not to Be Too Optimistic

12. (C) Ambassador opened the meeting with Defense Secretary Rajapaksa by explaining that the US is beginning to think through how the US might seek to help resettle internally displaced people (IDPs) into the recently cleared areas in the north. To do so we need a better understanding of the latest GSL thinking on the future course of the war in the north and the GSL goals for liberating key areas of the north from the LTTE. The Ambassador asked, for example, whether

the Secretary thought the GSL would be able to occupy all of the north by the end of the year. Rajapaksa responded that the Sri Lankan military probably would be able to capture the territory along the west coast up to and including Pooneryn by the end of the year. This was important both to open a land route to Jaffna, but also to prevent the LTTE from attacking Jaffna across the short lagoon that separates Pooneryn from Jaffna. Once Pooneryn was secure, the Sri Lankan army might be able to deploy some of its troops defending Jaffna to the military offensive in the Vanni. Rajapaksa also thought the GSL would capture Kilinochchi by the end of the year. He predicted that the capture of Mullaitivu in the east would take longer due to the onset of monsoon rains in October and expected heavier LTTE resistance. (DATT will report full conversation with Defense Secretary septel.)

Meeting with Basil Rajapaksa: Be Flexible

13. (C) In a later meeting with Basil Rajapaksa, who is the President's senior advisor and coordinator on all humanitarian issues, the Ambassador and AID Director Cohn initiated the discussion by saying that the US and many others are worried about the capacity of the Government Agents (GAs) in the north to manage the delivery of relief to the widely dispersed and fast-growing population of IDPs in the north. He urged the GSL to be flexible and have a back-up plan developed with the UN should the GAs not prove up to the task. He urged the GSL to consider the establishment of safe areas, humanitarian corridors or other

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measures to ensure the safety of civilians in the Vanni. He noted that with the exit of the UN, there would not be an "honest broker" in the Vanni to relay what the situation truly is and that the vacuum will likely be exploited by the LTTE to exaggerate as much as possible what will probably already be a difficult humanitarian situation.

GSL Plans to Provide 3 Months of Food and Medicine to Vanni

14. (C) Rajapaksa stated that he had met earlier with several diplomatic representatives. He stated that the GSL is currently handling the food and medical needs of the population in the Vanni, albeit with commodities provided by the World Food Program (WFP), ICRC and others. He estimated that it will be approximately three months until the IDPs in the Vanni will have the opportunity to move south into Government-controlled areas. He thought the LTTE would try to keep them in the north as long as possible (to provide a recruit base), but the combination of continued GSL military pressure and the onset of the monsoon rains in October will make it increasingly difficult for the LTTE to prevent the IDPs from moving south. The GSL therefore has initiated plans to procure and provide a three-month supply of food and medicines (including nutritional biscuits) for the population in the Vanni. He stated the GSL would like for this to be distributed with the participation/inspection/monitoring of ICRC and the WFP or UN (note: it is not clear the UN will agree). He believes that even if some of these items are confiscated by the LTTE, the international community will know that the GSL "did the right thing" in getting sufficient supplies to the North. He reiterated that the GSL would continue to be careful not to harm civilians in its ongoing military operations.

U.S. Humanitarian Assistance Must Be Monitored

15. (C) The Ambassador explained the USG's worldwide policy that requires the WFP to monitor the distribution of U.S. food and other assistance consigned to it to ensure it reaches the intended recipients. This policy would not allow us to provide food for the Vanni population without

appropriate monitoring. Basil responded that he wants WFP to monitor the lorries that will transport the food to the Vanni. He said that in his meeting later in the afternoon with the INGOs, he would ask how they might also help with monitoring. He said he would also invite UN Resident Representative Buhne to visit the Vanni periodically and report on what they see.

IDP Movements

¶16. (C) The Ambassador noted that everyone agrees the best option to help the IDPs would be if they could move south into Government-controlled areas where they could receive GSL, UN and other assistance. But the LTTE is likely to prevent them from moving because they need the IDPs for conscription and human shields. If the LTTE does let them go, many will be reluctant because they fear human rights abuses and other treatment they may be subject to. The Ambassador said it would be very helpful if the Government could issue public reassurances through leaflets and the media that IDPs who move South will not be fired on by Sri Lankan military, will not be subject to human rights abuses, and that they and their families will be allowed to remain together and receive care from UN agencies and INGOs in camps that will be established for them near Vavuniya. The Government should also make clear it will make every effort to re-settle them as quickly as possible in the north in accordance with international standards. Basil agreed the IDPs need to be reassured. He pointed out that people in the North had not had direct contact with the GSL for 25 years or longer, unlike in the East which had switched back and forth between GSL and LTTE control. This factor contributes to the

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reticence of the Vanni population to move out of the area as well as the fact that the LTTE continues to display confidence that they are winning the war.

IDP Camps

¶17. (C) Rajapaksa affirmed the President has said that the Government wants the best facilities to be provided for the IDPs when they do exit the Vanni. Accordingly, the GSL is preparing facilities in Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar. Also they are in touch with Sewalanka for the provision of temporary shelter as they have a proven track record in post-Tsunami activities.

Planning for the Medium Term

¶18. (C) The Ambassador told Rajapaksa the Embassy and U.S. Government are undertaking preliminary planning for how we might assist in resettling IDPs into recently cleared areas, assuming they do move South at some point. He asked for the GSL's thinking on how this would play out. Rajapaksa responded that a first priority would be demining in recently cleared areas around Mannar. The Ministry of Nation Building is responsible for demining and the GSL is carrying out an assessment. He said the Silawatura area (south of Mannar) is ready to be demined. There are 3000 IDPs there and September 21 is the target date to resettle them. He said the GSL will use Army deminers and also ask Norwegian People's Aid to move to Mannar.

Need Representative Political Institutions

¶19. (C) The Ambassador told Rajapaksa frankly that GSL political arrangements for the North, if not handled in a democratic manner, could impede the U.S. Government's ability to help resettle IDPs in recently cleared areas. He noted his particular concern about reports that Social Services Minister and EPDP leader Douglas Devananda would be appointed

to head an Interim Council in the North. Ambassador stated that Devananda enjoys almost no support in the North because of the extensive human rights abuses and extra-judicial killings the EPDP is believed to be responsible for. Basil clarified that the Chief Justice had determined the Interim Council was illegal and that in its stead he, Devananda, and Resettlement Minister Bathiudeen now participate in a Cabinet sub-committee. He also stated that there would be provincial council elections in the north once the fighting stops and that the GSL wants them to be "clean and fair."

Comments

¶10. (C) This was a good start in communicating USG concerns about the evolving situation in the Vanni. Basil Rajapaksa appeared responsive to our concerns and aware of the major challenges the GSL will face. International NGOs had a similar impression in their subsequent meeting with Rajapaksa (septel).

BLAKE